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The PRA tools for qualitative rural tourism research

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Abstract

Participatory Rural Appraisal, PRA, had been widely used in the western tourism research studies as an useful qualitative research and engineering tool in gathering qualitative information. This research had been carried out in a rural, exotic Iban village (the indigenous people of Borneo) named Nanga Sumpa, whom involved in the longhouse tourism. The researcher applied several PRA research tools in gathering opinions from Iban communities regarding authenticity and preservation of their culture for tourism purpose. The PRA tools appeared to be a very functional, easy-to-understand and easy-to-use engineering research tool, for both the researcher as well as the rural community, in gathering descriptive feedback and information.

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1. Introduction

The PRA tool is originally used as a policy making tool which helped the policy maker to gather information from grassroots or general public and at the same time, the general public can present clearly their problems or needs to the government and related authorities.

PRA tools as a new research and engineering tool, had been popularized by researchers from United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, from 1970s to 1980s [1]. There are over hundreds types of PRA techniques and tools had been used and described in variety of books or articles and the numbers are still growing today. These techniques can be categories into four groups [2]:

- **Group dynamics**, e.g. learning contracts, role reversals, feedback sessions
- **Sampling**, e.g. transect walks, wealth ranking, social mapping
- **Interviewing**, e.g. focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, triangulation
- **Visualization** e.g. venn diagrams, matrix scoring, timelines

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The very special characteristic of PRA tools are these techniques avoid writing but promote oral communication such as pictures, symbols, physical objects and group memory to gather information needed. New PRA tools are added to the list from time to time.

2. The PRA tools

According to Pratt and Loiz [3], PRA is tool that upgraded/reformed from RRA (Rapid Rural Appraisal) which emphasized on 'public participation'. The advantage of PRA compare to RRA is that the 'shifting of project' from researchers/ authorities to the communities themselves. As the result, the power of 'determine' and 'implement' the project also will be shifted from local authorities to the communities as well. It is believed that the more commitment of the local community to a project, the higher the chances for a project to achieve it target.

One of the specific characteristic of PRA is to be 'together' with the local community. Being together can be in the form of overnight in the village, live in the village for certain period of time, work with the villagers, doing their household chaos, farming, fishing etc together. The PRA research method is quiet similar to the method used by 'applied anthropology' such as discussed by King [4] through his research on colonialism in South East Asian countries.

PRA is a dual function research tool which means the PRA acts as a tool for data collection and at the same time, it is also an immediate analysis tool on site. The PRA engineering research tools help the researcher to analysis the responses from the local community immediately through activities and discussions. The answers gathered can be followed up with other research methods, such as semi-structure interview or in-depth personal interview for further detail information. The PRA tool can function better if the researcher is able to use it with open-minded and good communication skill [3].

Through the PRA activities, the lifestyle, way of thinking, way in solving problems and ability to monitoring of the community members can be easily revealed. In the other hand, PRA is also an engineering research tool to reveal the ability of individual or group in handling the project within the community. The function of researcher or facilitator is to kick start and enlighten the discussion but not to intervene or misleading the decision of the community members.

For the purpose of this research, five PRA tools had been chosen, i.e. the Activities Map, Matrix Scoring, Pairwise Ranking, Daily Routine Diagram and Focus Group Discussion. These PRA tools were chosen to analysis the local opinions on their involvement in longhouse tourism and authenticity of their culture. These tools helped the local community in understanding the research topic in a more simple and easy-to-understand way. In compliment to the PRA tools, the researchers can later follow-up with other quantitative supporting methods, such as questionnaire survey or face to face in depth interview to gather additional information needed.

3. Nanga Sumpa: the authentic longhouse tourism community

Nanga Sumpa received their first tourist in the year 1987 which was also the date for the completion of Batang Ai Hydroelectric Dam. Nanga Sumpa, an Iban village with 28 families stay under one roof, is located upriver of Ai river and take about 1 1/2 hour boat ride from the Batang Ai Dam (Figure 1).

Nanga Sumpa started the cultural tourism activities when a travel agency at Kuching, i.e. Borneo Adventure, signed the agreement of understanding with the villagers. With this agreement, the villagers would served the tourists, preformed the culture dance, selling of cultural product etc while the travel agency only promoted and brought the tourist, either local or international, to the longhouse [5]. Also in the agreement, the tourist may stay in a natural tourist lodge beside their longhouse which this lodge was built by the travel agent. Until today, Nanga Sumpa only received tourist bring by Borneo Adventure. The villagers who involved in any kind of touristic activities will be paid accordingly to the tourist packages. The rates of payment for different activities are various following the mutual agreement among the villagers. A tourism headman was selected among the villagers, to make daily duty rotation as well as managed the touristic activities with the travel agent [5].



Fig. 1 The location of the research area, Nanga Sumpa.

Nanga Sumpa had received several awards as the best village-based destination in Sarawak [6], such as:

- Highly Commended, British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Award – 1995
- Green Globe Commendation Award, World Tourism & Travel Council - 1996
- PATA Grand Award; Heritage & Culture, Ulu Ai Project - 1996
- PATA Green Leaf for Responsible Eco-Tourism – 1997
- Wild Asia's Responsible Tourism Award for Nanga Sumpa Lodge – 2006
- Award winning Sarawak-based Company with very professional staff, imaginative sightseeing and activity itineraries and a genuine interest in local people and the environment. - Lonely Planet 2010

Nanga Sumpa was a very appropriate tourism destination to carry out the PRA research method because of:

- 1) It location far from the town area which limit the movement of the villagers as well as the researcher that the research could be carried out in an close and less external influence manner,
- 2) The preservation of culture is very authentic which suit the research objectives well,
- 3) The villagers were not too exposed to any other researches or researchers which were good that they would provide sincere and honest answers,
- 4) It was also good to try up new research and engineering research tools in this new tourism destination.

4. PRA in action

For culture tourism research at an Iban longhouse, it was good to start with a more simple, relax and easy to understand PRA tool; the Activities Map.

i. Activities Map

Activities Map is a simple diagrammatic activity which provoke and kick start a discussion. In this research, a question on the tourism activities that carried out in the longhouse started the group discussion. This group activity used the group size of six to ten persons, as suggested by Morgan [7] for a small focus group.

The villagers spoken out the answers during the discussion while the facilitator/researcher written down the answers on a diagram prepared earlier. The interaction among members in the group produced more answers and all the answers were written down on the diagram. However, final answers which most related to tourism activities stayed on the diagram while the less related items were deleted off by the villagers after few discussions. Figure 2 was a sample of activities map done by the villagers.

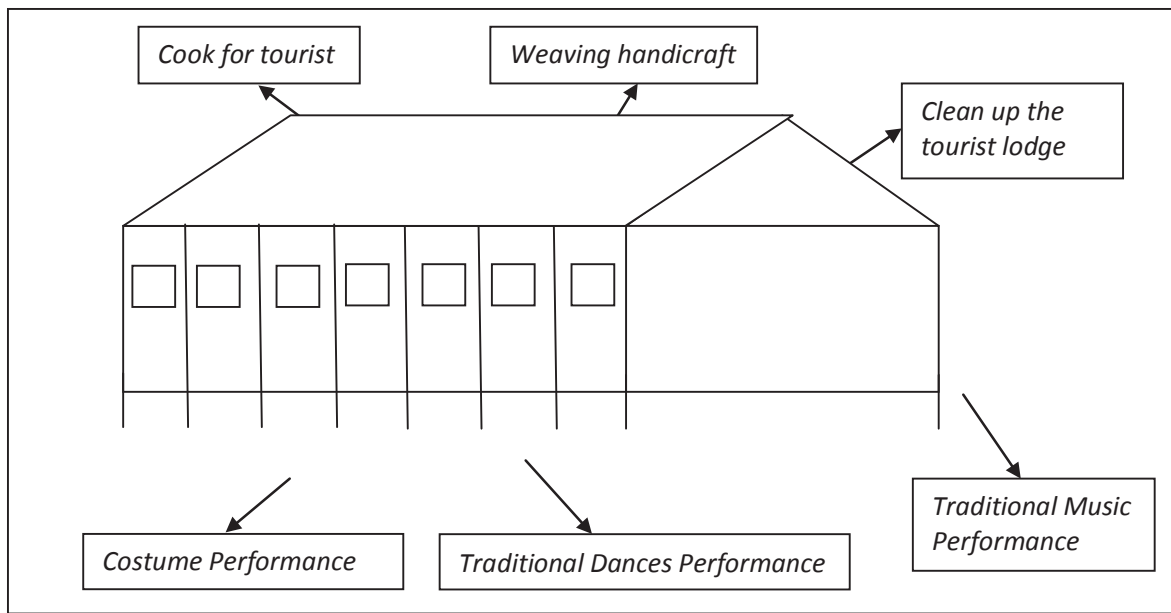


Fig. 2: Sample of the activities map done by the Nanga Sumpa villagers

ii. Matrix Scoring

Matrix Scoring is a stand-alone PRA tool or it can also be used as the follow up tool for Activities Map. The matrix scoring is an activity to measure and compare the level of importance of certain cultural activities (which these activities were taken from activities map above) to few variables which had been preset by the researcher. The preset variables maybe the core/main research problems that concerning the research objectives.

In my research two set of matrix scoring were prepared for examination, i. the involvement of women in longhouse tourism and ii. the perception of women villagers on the authenticity of longhouse tourism with some preset variables (Table 1 and 2).

Table 1: Matrix scoring for the involvement of women in longhouse tourism in Nanga Sumpa (Female)

	<i>Handicraft</i>	<i>Cooking</i>	<i>Playing Music</i>	<i>Dancing</i>	<i>Costume performance</i>
Income generation	?????	????	??	???	?
Time contribution	?????	????	??	??	?
Hard work	?????	????	?	??	?
Importance	?????	???	???	???	???
Control level	?????	?????	???	???	???

Table 2: Matrix scoring for the perception on the authenticity of longhouse tourism by Nanga Sumpa Villagers (Female)

	<i>Longhouse</i>	<i>Lifestyle</i>	<i>Dance</i>	<i>Costume</i>	<i>Handicraft</i>
Genuine	?????	?????	?????	?????	?????
Control Level	?????	???	?????	?????	?????
For Tourism	?????	?????	?????	?????	?????
Relationship among villagers	?????	?????	?????	?????	?????
Culture Conservation	???	???	?????	?????	?????
Time contribution	?????	???	???	???	?????
Income generation	?????	???	???	???	?????

The special characteristic of this activity is the material used for the score. Difference materials were used by facilitator to stimulate the involvement of villagers in the activities, such as stones, crops, peppers etc (Figure 3).



Fig. 3: the Nanga Sumpa villagers were doing the matrix scoring with the material, i.e. paper prepared by the researcher

From the experience of the researcher, the localized items were very familiar and friendly to the villagers and excited them to involve more in the discussion. Matrix scoring enabled the researcher to get direct analysis after the group activities done. In my research, from the preset variables, the researcher was able to make some conclusion directly from the activities such as: i. the women devoted most of their time and gained most reward (in term of money) in handicraft making (as shown in table 1) and ii. the women thought the most preservetable culture would be the dance, costume and handicraft but not building (longhouse) or lifestyle which could be changed through modernization (as shown in table 2).

iii. Pairwise Ranking

This PRA tool aimed to cross check the result of PRA activities map and matrix scoring or any items from observation. Pairwise Ranking is able to help the respondent in making decision on their most favourable activity. In my research, there was one pairwise ranking activity carried out to check on women most favourable activities in the village. In order to compare, the variables were made up of tourism and non-tourism activities. Table 3 shown the result of the activities which the villagers (especially the ladies) more interested in farming (growing crop for daily needs) compare to tourism activities (secondary or supporting activities only).

Table 3: Pairwise Ranking done by women in Nanga Sumpa

	<i>Weaving</i>	<i>Handicraft</i>	<i>Cooking</i>	<i>Farming</i>	<i>Planting</i>
Weaving		Weaving	Cooking	Farming	Planting
Handicraft			Cooking	Farming	Planting
Cooking				Farming	Planting
Farming					Farming
Planting					

The finding of this PRA tool could helped the researcher to conclude that tourism activities at Nanga Sumpa was still in the development stage (as suggested in tourist product life cycle) and the tourist were still welcomed by the village because of extra income generation (as suggested in the Euphoria stage of Doxey's Irridex and curiosity stage of Milligan's modification) [8].

iv. Daily Routine Diagram

Daily Routine Diagram is another PRA tool that useful for tourism anthropology research, especially in calculating the contribution of time for certain activities. In my research, a pair of diagram, with and without tourism activities had been plotted (Figure 4). From this activity, researcher found the villagers were always willing to spend their time for tourism activities if they had to carry out the activity in the designated period.

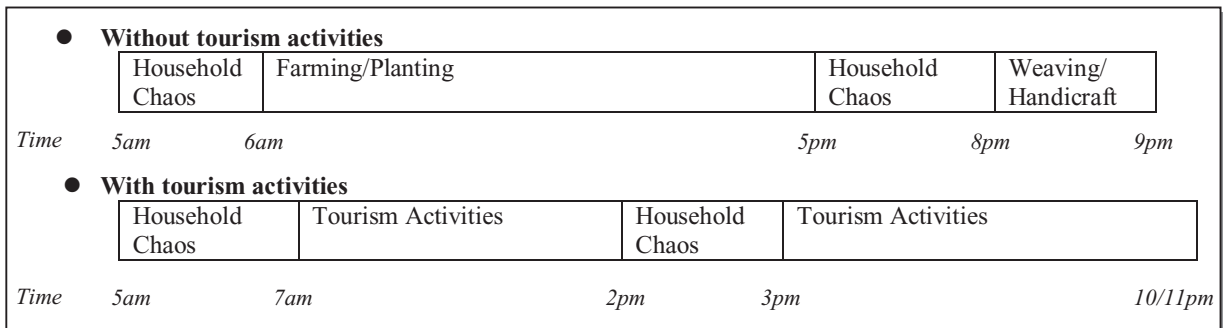


Fig. 4: Daily routine diagram showed the daily time contribution of villagers in Nanga Sumpa, with and without tourism activities

v. Focus Group Discussion

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a very famous tool in qualitative research, especially in the field of urban and regional planning, masterplan studies or government policy making which involve public participation. FGD also an unique PRA tool as well which it is an anthropological type qualitative research tool.

FGD had evolved from the various forms of group interviews used by social scientists in the 1920s. In between 1950s – 1980s, it was used for marketing research for a radio program [7]. FGD turn into a widespread research method by applied social scientists in social marketing research such as health. The strength of using FGD as a research tool is to create a process of sharing and comparing among the participants. Also in a lively group

discussion (usually six to ten persons), the participants will do the work of exploration and discovery for researcher [7].

From my research, three FGD were formed, i.e. male group, female group and adolescent group, with every group of five to six persons. These groups discussed on the preset topics which determined by the researcher. In the split group discussion, different opinions about the authenticity of culture and preservation of their own culture were gathered.

The male group thought the younger generation had less knowledge in practicing their tradition and preserving their culture while the adolescent group felt they had put their effort in learning the skills and customs from the elderly. The women group had their opinion that the preservation of culture was a self-motivated action from one's self and shall not be influenced by outside factors, such as tourism.

5. Conclusion

PRA is a technique to built rapport; elicit support, information and participation of the people in their own development [9].

The PRA is an engineering research tool which work almost perfect in a closed and low income grassroots community which allow the community to discuss, debate and find solution by their own and at the same time, the facilitator can get immediate and clear responses and feedbacks regarding the research topic.

The PRA tool is recommended for tourism research, not limited to rural and small-sized community but researcher should expand the possibility to apply the PRA tool in huge, urban and complex community.

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